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UNCLAS KATHMANDU 000924

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SUBJECT: Maoist Cease-Fire Claimed as Hoax; All-Party Rally for Peace

REF: KATHMANDU 915

Cease-Fire a Hoax, E-Mail Claims

1. (SBU) Two e-mails sent to local media outlets May 10 claimed that the previous day's announcement (Reftel) of a unilateral cease-fire by Maoist leader "Prachanda" was a hoax. Writing Nepali in the Roman script, the author, self-identified only as "Bikram," said he had intended the hoax to teach both the media and the Maoists a lesson. Journalists ought to verify their sources before publication, and the Maoists should take care to sign and authenticate their pronouncements, the e-mail read.

Maoists May Have Floated Trial Balloon

2. (SBU) Observers were quick to jump to the conclusion that the cease-fire offer had been a trial balloon to see how the government would react. By preserving complete deniability, they would not have to lose face, one local editor speculated. He added that Prachanda's statement announcing the cease-fire was apparently written by someone with a fine knowledge of English, but who also knows the Nepali media well. Baburam Bhattarai, leader of the Maoists brain trust, might have been capable of writing such a message.

3. (SBU) A journalist for a leading vernacular daily also thought the Maoists may have just wanted to test the government's reaction. After the Prime Minister came back with an adverse response, they denied they ever made the statement.

All-Party Rally for Peace Fizzles, Drips

4. (U) Leaders of most of Nepal's political parties gathered in central Kathmandu's Ratna Park May 10 to rally for peace and against terrorism. Premature monsoon rains turned the field to mud, and the orations, scheduled for 1 p.m., did not get underway until three o'clock, according to an Embassy FSN in attendance. Our local journalist contact expressed disappointment at the number of people at the rally, which he estimated at eight to nine thousand. He had expected more, and felt on that count the rally was "not very successful."

5. (U) Another local intellectual judged that even though the rally was widely viewed as anti-Prime Minister Deuba and anti-emergency - and each of the various organizers had their own separate agenda - it was important for people to get together to make a statement of unity against the Maoists.

Comment

6. (SBU) Arguments could be made both for and against the "hoax" theory. However, in recent weeks the Maoists have shown a willingness to issue flurries of press statements when it suits their interests. Although in this case a certain amount of ambiguity serves the Maoists' interests, we would not be surprised if the Maoists issue a statement in coming days to counter Prime Minister Deuba's wholesale rejection of their offer.

MALINOWSKI